FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA
TRABALLO DE FIN DE GRAO

Obsessive Neurosis and Paranoia in Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories

Carla Santos Barcenilla
Titor: Jorge Sacido Romero
Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

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Resumo

Edgar Allan Poe was a prolific writer known to be one of the American masters of the Gothic short story. Concerned with a wide range of topics such as death, isolation, or the paranormal, Poe creates a world full of terror which traps his tormented characters in a perpetual state of self-induced madness. Obsessions and subsequent compulsions, aggravated by continuous intrusive thoughts, shape the characters' psyche and contribute greatly to the deterioration of their balance. Thus, their actions and eventual crimes are a direct consequence of a climatic impulsiveness caused by their fixated moral perversion.

This BA thesis will analyse some selected stories by Edgar Allan Poe from a psychoanalytical point of view. It will bring to light the manifestation in each story of repeated patterns of Sigmund Freud's conception of obsessional neurosis, as well as its close relation to the development of paranoia. The analysis of Poe's stories will be, then, carried out within Freudian theoretical framework, which will be enriched by the contribution of other psychoanalysts.

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Obsessive Neurosis and Paranoia in Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories

Neurosis Obsesiva y Paranoia en los Relatos Cortos de Edgar Allan Poe

Neurose Obsesiva e Paranoia nos Relatos Breves de Edgar Allan Poe

Summary

Edgar Allan Poe was a prolific writer known to be one of the American masters of the Gothic short story. Concerned with a wide range of topics such as death, isolation, or the paranormal, Poe creates a world full of terror which traps his tormented characters in a perpetual state of self-induced madness. Obsessions and subsequent compulsions, aggravated by continuous intrusive thoughts, shape the characters' psyche and contribute greatly to the deterioration of their balance. Thus, their actions and eventual crimes are a direct consequence of a climatic impulsiveness caused by their fixated moral perversion. This BA thesis will analyse some selected stories by Edgar Allan Poe from a psychoanalytical point of view. It will bring to light the manifestation in each story of repeated patterns of Sigmund Freud's conception of obsessional neurosis, as well as its close relation to the development of paranoia. The analysis of Poe's stories will be, then, carried out within Freudian theoretical framework, which will be enriched by the contribution of other psychoanalysts.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, Psychoanalysis, Freud, Obsessive Neurosis, Paranoia

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Introduction

This BA Thesis manifests the way in which psychoanalysis allows a better understanding of characters' predicament in a selection of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, while also clarifying some central Freudian concepts through the analysis of Poe's Gothic narratives. Indeed, Freud's theorisations of obsessive neurosis and paranoia throw some light into the developmental and thematic aspects of Poe's work, whose characters are frequently subjected to severe psychological distress. In their turn, Poe's horror narratives invest psychoanalytical concepts with a degree of fictional concreteness.

Freud's psychoanalytical theory, which explores the processes of the human unconscious and their impact on behaviour, is a valuable tool for the interpretation of Poe's narratives, including their tragic outcome. It is also in light of literary analysis that this thesis aims to understand the forces of obsessive neurosis and paranoia. I shall illustrate how Freudian theory is suitable to explore Poe's own obsessive thoughts and paranoid symptoms. Furthermore, the present thesis also studies how the narrative devices and strategies used by Poe are correlates of the postulates of Freudian psychoanalysis. I will demonstrate how the author articulates serious psychological issues through distinct literary techniques, symbols and motifs, all of which contribute to constructing an atmosphere of gloom and horror that is the trademark of Poe's stories.

All in all, this study aims to contribute to the scholarly discourse on literature and psychoanalysis by showing how useful Freud's concepts are for

analysing Poe's stories. Paranoia and obsessive neurosis stand out in Poe's texts and determine the characters' tragic end.

Chapter 1 The Pathological in Poe

1. Outlining the Notion of the Pathological

For centuries, defining the notion of “mental pathology” has been a difficult task to accomplish. John Haslam, a renowned scientist who worked at the Bethlem Hospital in London – and who, interestingly enough, was the first doctor to ever provide a detailed account of what years later would have gone under the name “paranoid schizophrenia” – already warned in his *Observations of Madness and Melancholy* (1809) about the impossibility of providing an accurate definition of any behavioural deviation from normalcy. Although he assures that insanity presents itself in the form of mania and melancholy, and even goes further and cites numerous examples of madness, he fails to provide a detailed description of these symptoms and eventually falls short in his purpose to find an “infallible definition of madness” (p. 5).

Also in London, yet about thirty years later, psychologist William Charles Ellis published “A Treatise on the Nature, Symptoms, Causes, and Treatment of Insanity, with Practical Observations on Lunatic Asylums” (1838) with the intention to provide a better answer than the one offered by his fellow countryman. He claimed that past mistakes regarding the definition of the pathological were made due to a “total ignorance of the nature of the mind” (p.12), and later proved his point by providing an even broader outline of the concept, describing insanity as that which is contrary to sanity:

> Independently of cases of idiocy, imbecility, eccentricity, and moral evil [criminality] … man is sane, when […] the manifestations of his mind, his sentiments, passions, and general conduct, continue either to improve or to keep in accordance with the exhibitions of his previous powers and habits. (p. 15)

However, Ellis gave an important twist to the definition of the term when stating that “insanity is a disease of the brain, causing, or at least co-existing with, an injurious alteration in the intellectual manifestations, or in the conduct, or in both” (Ellis, 1838, p. 29). Although the notion of insanity remains vague, Ellis offers two new aspects to consider when observing madness: the intellectual dimension, and, perhaps most importantly in our case, the moral. He then delves deeper into the latter aspect and affirms that morality is what determines the categorization of madness as either dangerous or harmless. As expected, Ellis’ measurement of the different degrees of insanity would be later dismantled by new generations of psychologists and psychiatrists, who would categorize any sign of insanity as a potential threat and therefore refute Ellis’ belief that only physical violence was reason enough to confine the patient from society.

2. The Pathological in Edgar Allan Poe

Although this dissertation focuses on Freudian psychoanalytical theories at the conceptual level, it is important to acknowledge that Edgar Allan Poe did not know about such theoretical frameworks for obvious reasons: the poet had been long dead when Freud published his first works. However, many scholars have affirmed that Poe was deeply interested in the study of psychology, especially for maintaining verisimilitude in his works:

> With his passion for scientific fact and his interest in abnormal mental states, Poe would have been likely to turn to systems of contemporary psychology in the same way that modern writers have turned to Freud and Jung. Moreover, in Poe's day […] information regarding both mental and physical diseases was readily available to the intelligent layman, not only in the original works of the scientists, but also in popular journals and encyclopaedias. (Walker, 1966, p. 588)

In *Edgar Allan Poe: Amateur Psychologist*, (2021), Brentt Zimmerman proves this statement by citing one of Poe's letters to poet and literary critic James Russell Lowell – in which he admits his interests in the field – and a confession addressed to George Eveleth regarding Poe's *Eureka* (1848):

> The essay you enclose, on the igneous liquidity of the Earth, embodies some truth, and evinces much sagacity—but no doubt ere this you have perceived that you have been groping in the dark as regards the general subject. Before theorizing ourselves on such topics, it is always wisest to make ourselves acquainted with the actually ascertained facts & established doctrines. (Ostrom et al in Zimmerman, 1966, p. 813)

However, Poe's interest in the psychological field is not as an interesting topic for scholars as the outlining of the author's figure itself is: that is, the attempt to psychoanalyse Poe himself. This way, at the height of Freudian psychoanalysis, many authors revisited literature through this new perspective in the hope of finding a connection between Poe's personal life and the reason why he wrote such gloomy and harrowing tales.

Years later, in 1951, Philip Young published “The Earlier Psychologists and Poe”, a paper which documents contemporary reactions to the American author. However, it is interesting to note that many of the names cited in this paper are not those of psychologists of the time – if we consider psychology as an already stablished science in the late 19th century –, but rather those of close acquaintances of the poet.

In conclusion, as already remarked by the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, there is a clear evidence of a strong “temptation to seek through Poe’s works for signs of his personality and mental processes” (The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, 2012). Marie Bonaparte, a close friend and pupil of Freud, proved this very point years before Young with the publication of *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation* (1949), which aimed to profile the author by explaining how his traumatic life affected his writing. In her research, Bonaparte explains pivotal events which, as she concludes, eventually formed Poe’s psycho-neurotic personality.

2.1. When Art Imitates Life: *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe*

Although not much is known about Poe’s life, the little information available is key for understanding why many psychiatrists – including Sigmund Freud – were so interested in the psychological profile of the American author. In her research, Marie Bonaparte establishes a connection between the life of the writer and his own creations, highlighting the importance of two pivotal events in the author’s early life: the life-long absence of a paternal figure and the tragic death of his mother.

According to Hervey Allen's *Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe* (1926), Poe (19th January 1809 – 7th October 1849) was born in Boston, Massachusetts, to actors David Poe Jr. (18th July 1784 – 11th December 1811?) and Elizabeth Arnold Poe (1787 – 8th December 1811). It is said that David Poe, the author's father, died just days after his wife lost herself to, presumably, tuberculosis, but this fact remains open to debate, as David Poe – a known short-tempered alcoholic – abandoned both the stage and his family in 1809 without leaving any trace behind (Allen, 1926, pp. 17-27). Elizabeth Arnold kept working on the stage before she fell ill, but despite her considerable success she was unable to provide for her family, which at the time consisted of little Edgar and newborn Rosalie (20th December 1810? – 21st June 1874), as William Poe had been sent to live with his grandparents. Without a husband and without the capacity to support her children, the woman eventually ended up renting a room at Richmond while she kept acting until she became too ill for it so that Edgar and Rosaline Poe soon became orphans (Allen, 1926, pp. 14-22).

The deeply tragic death of Elizabeth Arnold had a profound and lasting impact on the young boy, searing an indelible image into his impressionable mind. The image of his beloved mother passing away in an unforgivingly cold and damp room would come to haunt him for the remainder of his existence. This haunting memory, so vivid and real, would not only torment him in his waking hours, but would also influence his literary endeavours. This chilling scene would be immortalised in several of his works, serving as a recurring motif that reflects the sombre themes of his tales. Notable examples can be found in masterpieces such as "Berenice" (1835), "Ligeia" (1838), and the iconic "The Fall of The House of

Usher" (1839), where this image is invoked to create an atmosphere of ominous foreboding and melancholy (Bonaparte, 1949, p. 7).

Then, shortly after Elizabeth Arnold's death, Poe moved in with John Allan and his wife Frances Keeling, who would become the writer's foster parents. Although his relationship with the woman has never been described as negative, Poe's relationship with his foster-father was not ideal for several reasons, including their naturally different personalities and the fact that the Scottish man never wanted to adopt the siblings since Rosaline's potential illegitimacy was widely spread at the time. The pair eventually parted ways around the 1830's, when the writer affirmed his desire of becoming a poet after failing an officer cadet. This may be one of the reasons why paternal figures in Poe's short stories would also be met with either rebellion or passivity, like in "The Tale-Tell Heart" (1843) or "The Pit and the Pendulum" (1842) (Bonaparte, 1949, pp. 491-594).

This repetition of events would not be unique throughout poet's life, as the ghost of his mother would haunt him once again after his beloved Mrs. Stanard died in 1824. Poe, who was a mere fifteen-year-old teenager back then, had grown close to the woman, who was twice his age, and also lost her due to a sudden illness which eventually deteriorated her mind and pushed her into madness. Poe's demeanour was said to become even darker after the death of Mrs. Stanard, the first of many Helens[1]. According to Bonaparte, the sudden loss of his first beloved, Mrs. Stanard, was the final cause of Poe's erotic fixation, as well as his psychic traumata leading to a repressed attraction to necrophilia. This way, Bonaparte explains that the deaths of his mother and first love, who

[1] Poe's poem alludes to Greek mythology: the author writes about the beauty of the woman he appreciates by comparing her to the beautiful daughter of Zeus, Helen. Bonaparte argues that every single one of Poe's lovers will become Helen as he would eventually lose them to death.

essentially was a projection of Elizabeth Arnold, prompted Poe's search for a reunion with the two women he had adored the most. Bonaparte later suggests that many of Poe's writings worked as a defence mechanism which allowed the author to escape from his projected desires, many of which orbited around the figure of his mother, terrifying the author. Bonaparte goes further into the topic and argues that Poe's intimate relationships should be analysed under the same optic which, according to many other psychoanalysts, tried to imitate Poe's relationship with his late mother, from his own sister Rosaline to his cousin and wife Virginia Eliza Clemm. The theme of loss of a young woman to death is a recurrent one in Poe (for instance, *Annabel Lee* [1849]) and clearly marked the author for life. Moreover, Poe explicitly declared in his "Philosophy of Composition" (1846): "the death, then, of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover" (p. 6).

After a rather short life, Edgar Allan Poe disappeared on September 7th, 1849, and was found dead a month later. It is said that he experienced symptoms of depression, which led him to a severe addiction to alcohol, and that this same addiction is ultimately related to his mysterious death (Allen, 1926, pp. 670-675).

2.2. Are Psychoanalytical Interpretations Legitimate?

However, despite the growing interest in Poe's motives, there are not few commentators who are against the theory that Poe's writing was influenced by his possibly deranged psyche. The premise was already advanced by none other than Bonaparte herself:

> Un certain nombre d'hommes, par un don mystérieux, ont le pouvoir de donner á ces reveries éveillées, à ces satisfactions fictives de leurs

> instincts, une forme permettant aux autres hommes de les rêver à l'unisson d'eux-mêmes. Par quels moyens ils y parviennent, de quelle nature est cette prime de beauté de la forme qui sert d'appât à leurs pareils, c'est lá un problème d'esthétique qui n'a pas encore ete résolu. La psychanalyse elle-même n'y est pas vraiment parvenue; ce difficile problème se dérobe encore á son investigation pourtant si profonde. (Bonaparte in Praz, 1933, p. 376)[2]

Following this line of thought, Swiss scholar Roger Forclaz published in the 1970's many works centred around the figure of Edgar Allan Poe, including a critique of Marie Bonaparte's psychoanalyst thesis. In his work from 1974, *Le Monde d'Edgar Poe*, Forclaz describes Bonaparte's conclusions as an "insane number of insanities and obscenities" (*The Mississippi Quarterly Magazine*, 1987). Following the line of thought of literary critics such as T.S. Eliot, Forclaz determines that "art is that which is completely independent from its creator" (Forclaz, 1974, p. 151), and then continues to prove his point by defending Poe's genius ability to create stories. Forclaz finally proposes that Poe's depiction of madness could be a natural trait of the short story, rather than a calculated invention. He quotes, among others, W.P. Trent and John Erskine to explain this essential characteristic of the genre: "a [short] story must have that inevitability which is the secret of the literary form. […] In Poe this inevitability of form perhaps

2. "*A certain number of men, by some mysterious gift, have the power to give to these waking dreams, these fictitious satisfactions of their instincts, a form that allows other men to dream them in unison with themselves. By what means they achieve this, of what nature is this bonus of beauty in the form that serves as bait to their peers, this is an aesthetic problem that has not yet been resolved. Psychoanalysis itself has not truly succeeded in this; this difficult problem still eludes its otherwise profound investigation*". (My translation)

encouraged a preference for subjects in which fate could be exploited" (Forclaz, 1974, p. 182).

3. Methodology and Framework

As seen in this chapter, psychoanalysing Poe's persona through his tales is a complex task, especially when considering that not much is known about the author. Because of this, the present thesis will be concerned solely with a psychoanalytic reading of some selected tales, with a special interest in Poe's characters. Similarly, pathologization in the research will be linked to some examples found in Poe's writing but cannot and does not serve as a confirmation of any diagnosis. It is important to bear in mind, though, that psychological diagnosis is not as centred in the expression of potential signs of mental illness as it is in the degree to which the patient is affected by their symptoms.

Finally, the search for the pathological in these stories will be framed by the psychoanalytical understanding of madness, as well as by Freud's three structures regarding the loss of sanity: neurosis, perversion, and psychosis. First, the neurotic symptoms will be explored through the analysis of obsessive-compulsive behaviour as well as repression. Perversion, on the other hand, will explain the rapid corruption of the characters' morality, while the irruption of the imaginary into objective reality through paranoia will shape the ultimate expression of psychosis.

Chapter II. An Immortal Instinct Deep within the Spirit: The Death Drive

The notion of the death drive, one of Freud's outstanding theorisations, is regarded in psychoanalysis as one of the most important concepts for explaining human behaviour. Thus, according to psychoanalysis, several elements in Poe's narratives suggest that Poe's characters suffered this unconscious urge to return to the pre-natal state known as "death drive". In this context, this BA Thesis explores the theoretical constructs around the death drive in order to examine Poe's Gothic narratives.

1. Background notions

Firstly, to understand the mental processes which according to Freud, lead to the concept of the "death drive", I must first mention two opposing psychoanalytic realities that are the conscious and the unconscious in his essays "Formulations Regarding the Two Principles of Mental Functioning" (1911) and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920).

1.1. The battle between the conscious and the unconscious

In psychoanalytical studies, the mind was first regarded as a structure divided into three levels. The first level, the preconscious, was strongly linked to the notion of the conscious, as it was a term used by Freud to later explain his idea of the repressed without addressing the unconscious in its entirety. The preconscious was, then, the accumulation of mental processes such as ideas or memories which were not actively repressed and could be brought up when needed. This notion, however, was then regarded as obscure to both explain and

comprehend, so Freud himself would eventually refer almost exclusively to the antithesis of conscious and unconscious, while also addressing the notions of Ego, Super-ego, and Id. Thus, the psychoanalytic study of the mind is mostly concerned with two types of processes: those stored in the conscious self, and those which the patient is unaware of yet may (and, in fact, do) exert their pressure in the former.

On the one hand, the conscious mind is perhaps the easiest one to understand, as it is responsible for the patient's knowledge of the world around as well as the ability to identify him/herself as a distinct being from others. In the study of the psyche, the notion of the unconscious is often directly linked to the appearance of cases of psychopathy, such as the ones analysed further on in this thesis – although, as Freud develops in many of his own papers, the reduction of pathologies to the clash of the forementioned antithesis results into a vague description of the complex processes behind the formation of mental deviations.

The unconscious, on the other hand, could be defined as the most important mental layer in psychoanalytic studies. This is evident in "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis" (1918), where Freud mentions how the dichotomy between conscious and unconscious is virtually impossible to describe when dealing with young patients, as the conscious self is yet in development at the earlier stages of life. Thus, Freud holds that unconscious processes are primary processes, whereas the conscious mental agency comes later, as an outcrop of the unconscious itself. This idea is further developed and explicitly stated in Freud's *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1917): "an individual process belongs to begin with to the system of the unconscious and can then, in certain circumstances, pass over into the system of the conscious" (p. 331). The ultimate

goal of psychoanalysis is then, in essence, to transmute the unconscious into the conscious mind through the elimination of any resistance which allows the appearance of repression in the patient's psyche (Freud, 1917, pp. 1-12).

1.2. Ego, Super-Ego, and Id

As anticipated earlier, Freud's second theory regarding the psychical apparatus is based on the distinction between the Ego, the Super-ego, and the Id (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, p. 130). The first and the latter term are closely related notions, although they are often analysed as opposites, and they both have to do with the idea of the unconscious.

On the one hand, the Id is the part of the patient's personality which is concerned with the instincts, such as the life and death drives. It is often at conflict with both the Ego and the Super-ego, which are genetic extensions of the Id itself. The nature of the Id is often questioned, with those who affirm its unconscious content is either "hereditary and innate" or "repressed and acquired" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, p. 197). The Super-ego, on the other hand, functions within the conscious and is related to the patient's character regarding their formation of ideals, role models, and a judgemental sense of self-observation and morality. Often, Freud intertwines the virtue of ethics with the conscious, therefore attributing to the Super-ego a behaviour of correctness and limiting the notion of the Id to the corruption of moral principles. Finally, the Ego, despite belonging to the realm of the unconscious – like the Id –, functions as a mediator between the forementioned terms, becoming a middle ground of both the unconscious and the conscious. The Ego is concerned with the interests of the patient, which is the reason as to why it provides the mind with compulsive and repetitive warnings of

discomfort such as anxiety when an unpleasant stimulus disturbs the balance of the neurotic mind.

Overall, the mind functions depending on the ruling of one of the three mentioned aspects. Although this research focuses on the mental processes within the neurotic psyche, dominated by the Super-ego, it is also worthy to note that an over-dominant Id is what develops into the deranged state of psychosis, while the healthy psyche is ruled by the Ego and its sense of factuality.

1.3. Example: “The Fall of the House of Usher”

In “The Fall of the House of Usher’, for instance, all three protagonists embody the Freudian division of the mind. The narrator is a literary expression of the Super-ego when considering that he is the source of morality and goodness in the story, as opposed to the corruption and decay emanating from the Usher house and two remaining members. This statement is clearly supported by the fact that the Usher family house is, symbolically, a representation of the “insufferable gloom” (Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher”, p. 1) experienced by the narrator from the first glance he takes of the building, thus further establishing the house as a metaphor for the unconscious – and the narrator himself as a conscious entity. Within the unconscious live Madeline and Roderick Usher, who are, respectively, manifestations of the Id and the defensive Ego. While the twin sister encompasses the notions of impulses, the most relevant element which characterises her as the Id is the sickening effect she has on her brother’s mental state, which worsens as her physical health decays.

Roderick Usher’s letter to the narrator, on the other hand, is a call for help, one in which the Ego´s self-preservation instincts derive in its mediation between

the Super-ego and the Id, as Roderick is, in essence, the figure which links up the characters of Madeline and the narrator. Roderick, as the Ego, desires the narrator, the Super-ego, to visit him from the conscious mind to restore the balance within the unconscious.

Nonetheless, upon Madeline's apparent death, both the narrator and, especially, her brother Roderick, begin more than ever to succumb to mental corruption. This is explained by the fact that Madeline is not dead yet, as she is a victim of a health condition which is regarded by Roderick as cataleptic. Taken as dead, the body of Madeline is then buried by Roderick and the narrator in a tomb below the house, meaning that the Id in the unconscious has not been balanced by the presence of the Super-ego and the Ego's search for preservation, but rather further repressed. The repression of the Id is exactly what provokes Roderick's anxiety to rapid grow, so the re-apparition of Madeline Usher causes the complete instability of the mind – and the house, symbolically, ends up collapsing.

2. The Pleasure Principle

In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", Freud cites Gustav Fechner's *Einige Ideen zur Schöpfungs- und Entwickelungsgeschichte der Organismen* (*Some Ideas About the History of Creation and Development of Organisms*) (1873) and confirms that his research regarding the relation between pleasure and mental events was similar, if not equal, to that of the German philosopher and psychologist. Both authors agree that unconscious pleasure-impulses desire a complete state of stability and that, on the contrary, the deviation from such a balance is what causes signs of negative reactions. Low and constant levels of excitation – that is, the quantity of energy stored in the nervous system and its

possible manifestations within the psyche – are the natural tendency of human mental processes. Thus, anything beyond or under this state of tranquillity is interpreted as displeasing, meaning that Freud's pleasure principle is strongly linked to that approached by Fechner under the label of "constancy principle".

In certain circumstances, however, the fulfilment of the pleasure principle is interrupted. On the one hand, it concerns the psyche of sane patients and is considered as a frequent and expected outcome. In this context, the pleasure principle – which is then replaced by the reality principle following the Ego-instincts of self-preservation – is analysed taking into account that the fulfilment of desire is not always possible and that the experience of gratification may be postponed temporarily. In other cases, however, the repression of those Ego-instincts which are deemed incompatible by the organism with its own preservation are the genesis of neurotic unpleasure, although Freud does not delve deeper into the question as to why pleasure becomes to be perceived as a displeasing sign by the patient in this context. Thus, the motion of "pleasure that cannot be felt as such" (Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", p. 11) will be further discussed in the next chapter in connection to obsessive neurosis.

According to Freud, every neurosis is characterised for having the power to lead the patient to avoid their own reality. Someone suffering from any type of neurosis – including that which I will explain further in the following chapter, obsessive neurosis – simply finds the outside world intolerable. From a psychoanalytical point of view, the unconscious obeys to "one of the two principles which, according to Freud, govern mental processes" (Laplanche, J. & Pontalis, J, 1988, p. 379) to avoid any displeasure or repression: the pleasure principle. In this theory, the Id becomes the governing force in the mind, and this

means that the Id's primal needs such as those related to sex or hunger become a priority. In other words, Freud's pleasure principle explains the human desire towards pleasure or lust and balance, and also the will to avoid negative experiences by either trying to fulfil those needs or, otherwise, escaping from reality.

In a neurotic mind, the second option is often the result of failing at meeting the Id's needs, and so reality is distorted to ease the overall discomfort provoked by such failure. Desire is then often presented by means of hallucinatory experiences and dreams, which consequentially cause the alteration of reality through the adjustment of the senses – essentially leading the patient to replace the objective outside world with their own construction of reality. In this new reality, the Ego – which develops during childhood – is again subverted, becoming dominated by the Id. Because of it, the second principle of mental processes, the reality principle, gains weight compared to the seeking of pleasure, and sometimes it can succumb completely to the pleasure principle during the experience of fantasies (Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", p. 1-8).

In a sane mind, however, the Ego balances out the Id's needs through the reality principle, which is heavily influenced by the conscious knowledge of an empirical reality and a plethora of social norms that either limit or completely reject certain behaviours. Thus, the neurotic will often defy the ability to fulfil their desire with, for example, impulsive and compulsive habits which will be explained in the next chapter.

Furthermore, within the framework of the reality principle, the Super-ego functions as a mental agency which regulates the link between the notions of desire and satisfaction, producing a response according to the conscious self's

morality, which, as earlier stated in this chapter, is the responsible for the patient's ideals and moral principles. Thus, based on the patient's personality and their understanding of the world, events and actions result in either the experience of emotions related to the Freudian notion of the Eros (or life principle), or, in opposition, a crippling sense of guilt, shame, and an overall disturbance of the patient's search for homeostasis, which navigates the path back to stability impelled by Thanatos (or the death drive). Respectively, both concepts represent in essence those instincts related to life and death.

2.1. Eros and Thanatos

Both Eros and Thanatos as objects of study in psychoanalysis were first coined by Russian psychoanalyst Sabrina Spielrein (1885-1924) in one of her works titled *Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being* (1912), which was published around almost a decade before Freud theorised the same notions in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle". In her work, Spielrein also defends the co-existence of both Eros and Thanatos within the human psyche, describing the latter term as "a wish for self-injury, a wish for pain, [which] is, however, thoroughly incomprehensible if we believe merely in the existence of an Ego that only desires pleasure" (p. 160).

In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", Freud also defines that the search for pleasure is essentially the desire for death, which is a primitive impulse for destruction, decay, and death in which the term of Thanatos references Greek mythology and its personification of death itself. In a letter to famous scientist Albert Einstein, Freud further described his understanding of the death drive as an element "at work in every living creature […] striving to bring it to ruin and to reduce life to its original condition of inanimate matter" (Einstein in Macqueen,

The Freud-Einstein Correspondence of 1932 and Psychoanalytic Theories of War (1996), p. 11).

In essence, this death drive is a consequence of the human need for, ironically, the pleasure found in life, as both ideas balance each other out, ultimately reaching the final and greatest state of homeostasis and equilibrium: namely, death.

2.2. Example: "Descent into the Maelstrom" and "The Pit and the Pendulum"

In Poe, this concept of destructiveness is often linked to what the American author and poet describes as "perverseness", which in psychoanalytic terms relates to other notions such as depravity, rather than that of perversion[3]. Although the representation of death impulses in Poe is usually violent, the author also depicts instances of conflict-free death drives, especially when connected to religion. In "The Future of an Illusion" (1927) and "Civilization and Its Discontents" (1930), Freud describes this 'oceanic feeling' (Parsons 1999, p. 36) as a that in which the patient connects to the external world as one, creating a sense of perpetuity.

In Edgar Allan Poe's "A Descent into the Maelström" (1841), the old captain recounts how, after the arrival of a dangerous tempest and the consequent wrecking of the ship he and his brother were travelling in, he fought for his own survival even when knowing that both siblings were practically doomed – as the whirlpool which threatened to engulf them was notorious for its violence and

[3] For Poe, perversion is an inclination that compels an individual to do something evil, contrary to reason and to what they consider right (Poe, 2017). According to Freud, perversion is the deviation from psycho-sexual development (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988)

deathly rates. However, after the sailor glanced at the scene, he felt oddly at peace and even considered the incident as a “view of so wonderful a manifestation of God’s power”, and immediately after, “positively felt a wish to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice [he] was going to make” (p. 9). On the other hand, Eros is depicted in the brother’s survival instincts, which drive him to act against his own family in order to save himself:

> As we approached the brink of the pit he let go his hold upon this, and made for the ring, from which, in the agony of his terror, he endeavoured to force my hands, as it was not large enough to afford us both a secure grasp. (p. 9)

Another example of life instincts is depicted in “The Pit and the Pendulum”, a story which narrates the imprisonment and torture of an unknown protagonist at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition. In his cell, the narrator discovers that he is in great danger, as a pendulum is both swinging and descending towards him. However, the protagonist is trapped by a rope, so he is unable to move or try to save his own life. Motivated by his wish to live, he intelligently comes up with the idea of using the food he was given by the Spanish guards and covers his body with it, causing the rats living in the cell to approach him and feed off him, biting the ropes and freeing him along the way, and also making the pendulum to stop its descend. After this event, the room begins to glow red and shrinks, making the narrator further anxious, as he now is certain that is going to die. Thus, he makes the decision to jump into a pit located in the middle of the room – which he had found by accident earlier in the story. It is important to point out that this choice is not motivated by the death drive, but rather by the traumatic situation. The

narrator does not want to die, and simply makes this decision to avoid as much suffering as he can, as it is described by the own protagonist:

> I shrank back -- but the closing walls pressed me resistlessly onward. At length for my seared and writhing body there was no longer an inch of foothold on the firm floor of the prison. I struggled no more, but the agony of my soul found vent in one loud, long, and final scream of despair. (p. 20)

3. Death and Life Instincts: Projection, Aggressiveness, and Ambivalence

Furthermore, it is also worthy to note that both death and life drives function together, but in a state of opposition, often creating an atmosphere of tension, since the patient's desires are essentially contradicted by the clash between these notions. While Eros searches for the fulfilment of the patient's libido – the energy produced by life instincts –Thanatos often leads to aggressive conducts which sometimes are strong enough to finally succumb to the death drive, by committing suicide or performing acts of self-harm, for instance. In Edgar Allan Poe, however, aggressive behaviours motivated by the protagonists' death drive are targeted to the external world by means of projection. Usually, the stories feature examples of mental self-destruction which then manifest into the real world through the expression of obsessions, compulsions, and other maladies like paranoia. These terms will be further explored in the next chapter.

For Freud, projection is the "operation whereby a neurological or psychological element is displaced and relocated in an external position" (Laplanche and Pontalis, p. 349). For Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), "projections change the world into the replica of one's own unknown face" (Jung Society of Utah, 2016), and they can occur in both contexts of the Thanatos and the Eros.

Regarding the death instincts, projection can turn the patient into a dangerous being who now attempts to annihilate the object of such desires, as he explains in “Totem and Taboo” (1913) regarding primitive people and their reaction to death:

> The hostility, of which the survivors know nothing and moreover wish to know nothing, is ejected from internal perception into the external world, and thus detached from them and pushed on to someone else. It is no longer true that they are rejoicing to be rid of the dead man; on the contrary, they are mourning for him; but, strange to say, he has turned into a wicked demon ready to gloat over their misfortunes and eager to kill them. It then becomes necessary for them, the survivors, to defend themselves against this evil enemy; they are relieved of pressure from within, but have only exchanged it for oppression from without. (p. 27)

Aggression is, then, a “real or phantasy behaviour intended to harm other people, or to destroy, humiliate or constrain them, etc.” (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, p. 17), and Freud attributes it to a way to satisfy masochist sexual needs through a master-object relationship, and even to the Oedipus Complex (“Instincts and their Vicissitudes” (1915)). Years later, the motion was similarly explained in Jacques Lacan’s “Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis” from *Écrits* (1966):

> The notion of aggressiveness as a tension correlated with narcissistic structure in the subject’s becoming allows us to encompass in a very simply formulated function all sorts of accidents and atypicalities in that becoming. I shall indicate here how I conceive of its dialectical link with the function of the Oedipus complex. In its normal form, its function is that of

> sublimation, which precisely designates an identificatory reshaping of the subject and —as Freud wrote when he felt the need for a "topographical" coordination of psychical dynamisms — a secondary identification by introjection of the imago of the parent of the same sex. (p. 95)

Life and death instincts, despite their opposite nature, can occur simultaneously in the patient's psyche in a state of ambivalence, which explains how some Edgar Allan Poe characters project their aggressiveness onto objects they love and feel a warm connection with. Love and hate in this context, and, especially, the aggressive feeling born from their clash, "proves to be fundamental in a certain series of significant personality states, namely, the paranoid and paranoiac psychoses" (Lacan, 1966, p. 43). The notion of ambivalence is summarised by Laplanche and Pontalis in *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (1988), bringing into light its conflictive nature:

> The term of ambivalence was borrowed by Freud from Bleuler […] Ambivalence is exhibited above all in certain pathological conditions (psychoses, obsessional neurosis) and in certain states of mind such as jealousy and mourning. It is characteristic of certain phases of libidinal development in which love and destructive tendencies towards the object are to be found alongside each other. (p. 26)

3.1. Example: "The Black Cat"

In Edgar Allan Poe, the connection between these three terms – projection, aggression, and ambivalence – is key to understand the transition from sanity to states of madness. A great example of ambivalence is present in the author's

“The Black Cat” (1843), in which its narrator begins the story by explaining his passion for animals:

> I was especially fond of animals and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding and caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in my manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. (p. 3)

Furthermore, the adoration the protagonist feels for Pluto, the object of aggression in the story, is also evident in the first paragraphs of the narration:

> Pluto -- this was the cat's name -- was my favourite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets. (p. 4)

Such is the narrator’s love for the cat that, despite the fact that he “grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others” (p. 4) because of his addiction to alcohol, the narrator “still retained sufficient regard to restrain [himself] from maltreating him” (p. 4) at first, until “even Pluto began to experience the effects of [his] ill temper” (p. 5).

Then, the narrator brutally attacks the cat, and immediately recalls how his feelings of guilt soon turned to “irritation” and “perverseness” – which is a “longing of the soul to vex itself -- to offer violence to its own nature” (p. 5). The fact that the narrator recurs to alcohol as a way to cope with his problems advances his desire to escape from his reality, and the consequent projection of his own hatred for life is manifested in the violent acts he commits against what he loves.

Of course, ambivalence is evident in the story, as the narrator is initially conflicted by his emotions of Eros and Thanatos. However, as the narration progresses, it is interesting to note that because of the protagonist's tendency to neurotic and paranoid behaviours he grows completely detached from reality, and ambivalence between love and hate becomes an example of Poe's characters descend into madness.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained how Poe creates horror and raises the ground for neurosis in his characters using the basic structures of the human psyche, such as those of the Ego, Super-ego, and Id – the basic notions for the understanding of the pleasure principle. This theory defends that the human mind is divided into two extremes which Freud referred to as life and death drives. The first drive is Eros, which envelopes the instinct of survival, reproduction and pleasure. Thanatos, on the other hand, drives towards uncreation and return to an inorganic state. In fact, these forces, moved by voluntary or involuntary impulses, are frequently antithetical yet ambivalent to one another, adding a new layer of complexity when analysing the human psyche. In Poe's works, the pervasiveness of this ambivalence is detectable in characters' projections, who lack the possibility to fight the opponent within themselves and aim the aggressive drives to external objects. Projection, thus, becomes a defence mechanism which is also transformed into a weapon, a means of warding off the death drive while also enacting it – ultimately leading the characters to their lunacy. With the increase in the level of ambivalence, the difference between love and hate becomes more difficult to establish. Finally, anxiety is expressed through distorting reality in order to escape an internal battle. Consequently, characters

identify with their projections, slowly going out of their minds and absorbed by the elemental forces at work in the unconscious.

Further research could investigate Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic framework in Poe's characters through the analysis of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary. In addition, a thorough differentiation between the death drive and a mere fascination with death could also contribute to the identification of Freudian theories present in Poe's work.

Chapter III. “I Became Insane with Long Intervals of Sanity”: Obsessive Neurosis

The notion of the death drive is often mentioned as one of the motivators of neuroses: defence mechanisms which are rooted in the impossibility to repress emotions, ideas, and other elements such as desires. Although Freud initially differentiated several types of neuroses, such as those of trauma, transference, and repetition, he ultimately ascribed the term to define only three mental illnesses: obsessional neurosis, hysteria, and phobic neurosis - although in this essay I will only analyse in detail those instances of obsessional neurosis in some of Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories. This chapter, therefore, intends to shed light on how some sub-types of neuroses relate to the obsessional neurosis in particular, manifesting the complexities found in the analysis of the human psyche even in literary expressions. Due to the difficulty of analysing the many possibilities in which a pathology can be manifested, I will only comment on one of the patterns present in Poe’s works – one for which the previous chapter serves as a clarification of the mind’s functioning, and to which this chapter serves as an explanation of the characters’ behavioural deviation from sanity and eventually development of neurotic features. The best way to understand how obsessive neurosis is presented in Poe’s stories is through the analysis given by Freud in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”. As in many other Freudian proposals, the key factor for the development of obsessive neurosis dates back to the patient’s childhood. Because of the inability to know about the background of literary characters, I will refrain from delving into that matter, and I will only consider pivotal points in the narratives, which are narrated by adult characters.

1. Types of Neuroses and Their Relation to Obsessive Neurosis

Although obsessive neurosis is regarded in psychoanalysis as the most prominent type of pathologies, it is also worthy to note that each manifestation is different and possesses a wide range of characteristics – some of which I will focus on in my study, mainly those related to the presence of trauma and repetition neuroses.

1.1. Trauma

On the one hand, trauma tends to be the defining factor in the mental deviation from normal conducts, as Freud states in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”. Traumatic neuroses are those caused by a shocking and sudden event, and they are closely related to life-threatening danger, as they develop in the patient’s mind as a reaction to such experience (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, p. 471). Danger plays a key factor in the categorization of these types of neuroses, which are often analysed based on how they relate to either anxiety, fear, or fright, and all three elements are present in Edgar Allan Poe.

Cases of traumatic neurosis based on anxiety, which is described by Laplanche and Pontalis as “chronic anxious expectation”, stems from the conviction that discomfort will come, although it may not be present yet. The object of anxiety can be known or not, although awareness is often the most usual case in these neuroses. Anxiety is relevant for the analysis of some features in Edgar Allan Poe, and it is also a recurrent theme in obsessive neurosis, as already mentioned. For instance, anxiety is the motivation behind Prince Prospero’s need to halt the music only to hear the pendular clock chime, as he is essentially expecting death to arrive to his secluded palace, which was built to

avoid death itself in the first place. In this example, Prince Prospero becomes expectant of death's possible arrival, probably because deep down he knows that he cannot escape the plague which has affected most people in his reign. In psychoanalytic words, Prospero's anxiety towards death is prompted by the terror of a traumatic event which he was a witness of: namely, the Red Death.

Fright, on the other hand, affects the patient "when [they are] in such a state of unreadiness that [they are] at a loss either to protect [themselves from it] or to master it" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, p. 174). In Poe's stories, this theme is often represented by recurring to the symbolic manifestation of the paranormal. In "Civilization and Its Discontents", Freud relates the notions of anxiety and fright by stating that guilt stems from the latter, and that the ultimate expression of conscience is equal to the patience's fear towards their own Super-ego. These terms characteristic of traumatic neuroses based on fright are well depicted in "William Wilson" (1839). In the short story, the first instance of fright occurs when the narrator sneaks into William Wilson's bedroom while he is asleep only to prank him. However, when the then-young narrator's light flashes his rival's face, "[his] breast heaved, [his] knees tottered, [his] whole spirit became possessed with an objectless yet intolerable horror" (p. 14). The sense fright is evident, especially when considering that William Wilson's face is perceived by the narrator as a spitting image of his own body. The use of duplicity is not rare in Edgar Allan Poe, and in this case it follows the supernatural figure of the Doppelgänger. Furthermore, the relation between fright and guilt is also navigated through the narrator's double, as William Willson is, in essence, a

portrayal of the protagonist's conscience[4]. The fact that William Willson appears in the narrator's life during his childhood further relates to the last chapter's description of both the conscious and the Super-ego.

In the analysis of trauma, fear is different from fright because it does not have enough strength to elevate the patient's psyche into a state of agitation. Although it is also present in Poe, this notion is not as relevant for the study of neuroses, as fear is a human characteristic which does not necessarily lead to the development of any type of mental illness.

1.2. Repression and Suppression

Oftentimes, traumatic events lead to the repression of primitive instincts, which is an unconscious method of defence against the remembrance of uncomfortable emotions. Repression, however, is also studied in psychoanalysis as a way to avoid the fulfilment of an instinct which could, simultaneously, bring both pleasure and displeasure. Suppression is also a defence mechanism, but its definition is opaque and obscure, as it possesses a wide range of senses. In this essay, I will refer to suppression as a protective force which is formed in the conscious mind and is motivated by the reality principle and the morality and ethics behind it (Freud, "Interpretation of Dreams", p. 23-26). Suppression and repression are, then, similar concepts which deal with the duality between the pleasure principle and the strong censorship present in the reality principle. While repression is much more complicated to analyse, at it works within the unconscious, a patient must perform acts of conscious judgement in order to reach the suppression of certain obsessions or thoughts. Condemnation

[4] This is advanced in the epigraph of the story: "*What say of it? what say of CONSCIENCE grim, / That spectre in my path?* (from Chamberlaine's *Pharronida*)" (p. 1).

implicates the patient's awareness of the anti-moral nature of their thought, and a consequent sense of guilt for having such obsessions. Censorship of obsessions is essentially a process of self-correction ruled by the presence of the patient's needs to adapt to social norms.

In some cases of neurosis, the condemned is further modified by the egotistic sense of self-preservation, and it is possible that this defence mechanism causes the need to transfer the judged obsession to a state of unconscious repression so that guilt does not alter the psyche's balance as much as the conscious thought. However, the sudden oblivion of a conscious element into the depths of the repressed is impossible to perform, and it is typical in these causes that, consequently, the patient will later develop patterns and conducts in their behaviour as a way to ease the need to fulfil the persistent obsession. These acts are referred to as compulsions and are performed as much as the obsession is repeated in the mind (Freud, 1921, pp. 1-9).

1.3. Obsessions, Compulsions, and Impulses

Other features of obsessive neurosis include obsessive-compulsive behaviours, as well as the impulsivity born from them. Compulsions and obsessions can be analysed separately, but they are nonetheless studied under the same framework regarding neurosis. I mentioned in the last chapter that the neurotic pleasure is characterised by the inability to produce a sense of fulfilment in the patient, and it is the clash between the pleasure principle and the reality principle what produces such effect. Thus, the neurotic mind is constantly agitated by the ambivalence between the desire to fulfil an obsession and the need to satisfy the compulsion which avoids said wish to be realised. Because of this is anxiety considered a defining feature of the neurotic mind, who is painfully

aware that what is being suppressed will always make itself present again in the future.

In most cases of obsessive neurosis, the compulsions are of impulsive nature, meaning that the patient feels more than a wish to act in their ritualistic way. Compulsions are motivated by the patient's obsessions, and they can fall within two opposite groups: those which fit the patient's ideals and those which attempt against them. Freud refers to them as Ego-syntonic and Ego-dystonic, respectively.

1.4. Repetition and Reality Testing

Compulsions and obsessions are rooted in repression. At the same time, the repressed traumatic event is also connected to the matter of repetition, which is mainly a consequence of the fatalistic conception of their future after trauma is experienced, especially during childhood, and in neurotics it often develops into an obsession. Of course, these manifestations of repetition are not consciously activated, but are rather imposed in the patient's conscient mind by the unconscious. Thus, neurotic repetition is not an active thought, but it cannot be confined within the pleasure principle either. In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", Freud once again recurs to dreams and child-play as the main ways to analyse the root of repetition, though only the first feature is relevant for my analysis, considering that every character I have or will mention in this project is an adult.

Repetition and obsession neuroses often co-exist in the neurotic mind. The repressed unconscious will never be able to be transferred to the conscious mind unless resistance comes to a cease. This exact resistance, however, is what forces the pleasure principle into view in these cases of neurosis, the Ego-

instincts defend the organism against displeasure by avoiding the liberation of the repressed. It is at this point that the psyche enters an ambivalent state in which the Ego's stability is altered, since discomfort is also present when the repressed – whether in the shape of memories or instincts – is re-lived by the patient. Repetition in neurosis also is characterized by the fact that the act itself is a source of pleasure for different organisms, forces, or motivations present in the patient. Obsessive repetitions are often related to the realm of the instinctive and are extremely frequent in the behaviour of children – who then typically grow into adults and lose this distinctive characteristic. While children find pleasure in repetition, as it is a way for them to master their impressions of the external world, adults find comfort in originality and newness. The pleasure of repetition in this case does not pertain to the pleasure principle, as both elements work together for the enjoyment of the child – a hedonistic feature that is lost in the obsessive repetition of traumatic events born out of transference. In these cases, as well as those in which the patient refuses to liberate the repressed due to their own fear of it, the obsession goes against the pleasure principle, and gains a "daemonic force" (Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", p. 292). Carl Jung also mentions this "daemon" in *The Development of Personality* (1954), using the term as a metaphor to explain vocation:

> Vocation acts like a law of God from which there is no escape. The fact that many a man who goes his own way ends in ruin means nothing to one who has a vocation. He must obey his own law, as if it were a daemon whispering to him of new and wonderful paths. Any-one with a vocation hears the voice of the inner man: he is called. (p. 176)

Another interesting factor of obsessive neurosis present in these stories is the need for reality testing, which is directly related to repetition. Reality testing is one of the consequences of the reality principle, and in altered mental states it becomes a source of doubt in the patient, as the objective reality and the imagined reality clash for dominance – forcing the patient to question what version of reality they should trust. Although in most cases the imagined reality is the one the neurotic ultimately believes in, there is always a remnant of the empirical reality which provokes repetitive questioning and a deep feeling of distress. The doubting of reality often leads to a climatic downfall in Poe's stories, climaxing in the total believe of the subjective reality over the objective one through the manifestation of paranoia.

2. Analysis of Obsessive Neurosis in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Imp of the Perverse"

Freud and many other psychoanalysts often explain the previously mentioned terms one by one, isolating the connection between them. However, all these notions must be taken into consideration in the analysis of obsessive neurosis, and their mutual relationship is also necessary to shed light on how characters manifest their neurotic behaviour. The reason as to why these terms are not clearly related in most psychoanalytical works is due to the many possible patterns in which sub-types of neuroses can combine in order to develop obsessive neurosis, and manifesting each of them would be a rather impossible task. Thus, the following analysis will focus on two patterns: one in which obsessive neurosis seems hereditary, and another one where the illness is caused by a traumatic event later in life.

2.1. “The Tell-Tale Heart”

In this story, it could be argued that the narrator’s psyche has always been neurotic. I mentioned earlier that the psychoanalytic analysis of a character’s past – especially in such short stories – was rather impossible to study. The narrator of “The Tell-Tale Heart” begins his narration by confessing to the reader that “nervous – very, very dreadfully nervous [he] had been and [is]” (p. 1). The narrator blames his crime in retrospect on his illness, and especially the power it had to heighten his senses – which, as I discussed above, is one of the consequences of a patient altering the objective reality around them. Furthermore, another characteristic of neurosis in the narration’s introductory paragraph is the inability of the narrator to perceive his illness as a negative reaction born out of his unpleasant state, and rather as a positive sign of his superior intelligence.

In “The Tell-Tale Heart”, obsessions, compulsions, and repetition are the main manifestations of obsessive neurosis, which counteract the narrator’s feeling of “terror”, which, it could be argued, is, in its turn, motivated by the narrator’s fear of death and then projected onto the old man: “He was still sitting up in the bed listening; – just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches[5] in the wall” (p. 5). In essence, the narrator is reminded of his own mortality by the old man’s age, and he believes that his only way to escape such feeling is by murdering the elder person. This statement is further supported by the possibility that the “eye” the narrator is disturbed by could be a metaphor that stands for the protagonist himself, as the word sounds identical to “I”.

[5] Deathwatch beetles. They are seen, according to superstition, an indication of a death (J. Sherman, Storytelling: An Encyclopaedia of Mythology and Folklore (2015), p. 242).

Thus, the narrator's obsession with death, and therefore the old man, becomes the reckoning force which motivates his compulsive behaviour, which is especially strong at night. The narrator's fear becomes evident when, one night, he realises that the old man is also scared for his life, and the young man recognises the emotion the old man is experiencing:

> Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief --oh, no! --it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. (p. 5)

The narrator's obsession with death is also what motivates his ritualistic compulsion, which is observing the old man's eye – as if being able to catch a glimpse of it creates a sense of control in the protagonist. Thus, the narrator awaits "every night, just at twelve", to enter the old man's bedroom hoping to see the "Evil Eye". This compulsion, as it is characteristic of neurotic behaviour, also brings a deep feeling of unpleasure, as the narrator becomes agitated by staring at the eye of the sleeping man until the protagonist, driven by anger, kills the old man. Again, the protagonist's impulse for making sure that he has indeed murdered the old man is what causes him to obsessively check on his victim's heart, essentially making sure that the murder was not a figment of his own imagination:

> The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it

> there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more. (p. 6)

After the narrator's complete detachment from the outside reality, his descent into a paranoid state is what prompts his confession, highlighting the importance of paranoia as a bridge connecting obsessive neurosis to utter madness.

2.2. "The Imp of the Perverse"

In "The Imp of the Perverse" (1845), the notion of obsessive neurosis is developed throughout. The narrator begins the tale by explaining how what he refers to as "the imp of the perverse" controls human behaviour, and essentially justifies his actions by admitting that he was possessed by the malevolent entity.

To the narrator, this creature forces the patient to perform Ego-dystonic acts – that is, against their will –, and is responsible for the destructive obsessions which lead to the protagonist committing murder. The unnamed narrator refers to these impulses as perverted because he is aware of their anti-moral nature, and provides an explanation as to why he cannot escape from them:

> Our first impulse is to shrink away from the danger. Unaccountably we remain… it is but a thought, although a fearful one, and one which chills the very marrow of our bones with the fierceness of the delight of its horror. It is merely the idea of what would be our sensations during the sweeping precipitancy of a fall from such a height... for this very cause do we now the most vividly desire it. (p. 3)

This way, the narrator acknowledges the function of notions which have been explained in previous chapters, such as the clash between the reality and pleasure principles, or, even, the workings of the Super-ego. Furthermore, the

transition from a simple thought to an obsessive-compulsive act is also detailed by the narrator as a justification of his crime:

> That single thought is enough. The impulse increases to a wish, the wish to a desire, the desire to an uncontrollable longing, and the longing (to the deep regret and mortification of the speaker, and in defiance of all consequences) is indulged. (p. 2)

Thus, the narrator is a great example of a patient suffering from a neurotic break based on obsession, especially when considering the amount of time he had been planning the murder, which the protagonist himself admits to having been “for weeks, for months”.

What is more, by analysing the motive behind the narrator’s confession, it becomes clear that his psyche is dominated by “the imp of the perverse” – or, as mentioned earlier, his Ego-dystonic impulses. Essentially, the narrator is driven by his need to perform that which he is against: he murders his relative simply because he knows he should not do it, and he ends up confessing as an impulse against not wanting to be discovered as the culprit. The justification of his confession, then, is none other than his obsession of not wanting to confess: “there arrived at length an epoch, from which the pleasurable feeling grew, by scarcely perceptible gradations, into a haunting and harassing thought. It harassed because it haunted. I could scarcely get rid of it for an instant” (p. 4).

The ritualistic compulsion which is born out of the narrator’s desire to silence his urges is also an example of obsessive-compulsive neurosis, as the protagonist’s repetitive mantra of “I am safe” serves as a way to explain the self-defence instinct for balance. What is more, the narrator also explains the ultimate

inability to hush his obsessions, manifesting the existence of untold past events which were also a consequence of his neurotic mind:

> No sooner had I spoken these words [“I am safe”], than I felt an icy chill creep to my heart. I had had some experience in these fits of perversity, (whose nature I have been at some trouble to explain), and I remembered well that in no instance I had successfully resisted their attacks (p. 5)

Interestingly enough, the narrator then counteracts the failure of his compulsion against his obsession with the addition of a new compulsion, which is the symbolic act of running away. However, as was advanced by the narrator, he is unable to escape from “the imp of the perverse” and publicly ends up confessing.

3. Conclusion

The presence of obsessive neurosis in Edgar Allan Poe forces characters to act through compulsive and repetitive behaviours against themselves, manifesting the inner anxieties and turmoil born out of their deranged mental state. Their obsessions are often rooted in inherent anxiety and fear, although some tales also depict traumatic experiences. Be it as it may, their actions are deeply influenced by their illness. In this chapter, two examples of obsessive neurosis found in Poe’s oeuvre have been analysed without taking into account the connection between the malady and madness, as I will explain how paranoia contributes to the development of madness in the next chapter. Nonetheless, the importance of obsessive neurosis as a contributor to the fracture between reality and illusion has been addressed in the examination of two different tales with a

similar pattern: the ultimate confession of the characters, not out of guilt, but rather out of paranoia and the need for self-destruction, respectively.

Finally, a deeper knowledge of Edgar Allan Poe's biographical background would allow us to understand how the author relied on his writings as a way to ease his mind from his personal torment, and thus creating obsessive characters. Furthermore, a close analysis of the relationship between Poe's narrators and their antagonists could serve us with a better understanding of how obsessions are able to evolve and force the appearance of new compulsive habits.

Chapter IV. Much More of Madness and More of Sin: Paranoia

Paranoia is, alongside obsessive neurosis, one of the Freudian chronic qualities of the insane. Although Freud considers them as two separate pathologies, the psychoanalyst also brings forward the many similarities that, sometimes, even complement each other in the development of psychotic states. Following this line of thought, I will establish in this chapter some of the differences between these two notions, and closely examine instances of paranoia and how it contributes to the development of madness, or psychosis. In Poe, characters usually manifest obsessive-compulsive behaviours which result in a paranoid disorder that completely detaches them from the empirical reality around them. If obsessive neurosis caused the protagonists to doubt whether their reality was objective or imagined, paranoid characters become completely delusional and are unable to experience external reality. Thus, the characters I am going to examine in this chapter suffer from severe hallucinations which they experience as if they were real. For this purpose, I will analyse the influence of the Freudian notions of rumination and the uncanny as the main motivators of paranoia, while also exploring paranoid manifestations through some literary expressions such as symbols, the narrators' unreliability, and the theme of moral corruption.

1. Rumination, Intrusive Thoughts, and Trance

Now, when analysing Mrs. P's case, Freud first introduces his belief that paranoia is a defence mechanism which is especially efficient when dealing with repression. In many of Poe's tales, paranoia is exhibits the same symptoms as those described later on by Freud in "Further Observations on the Defence-

Neuropsychoses" (1896) such as feeling observed, the sense that people around can somehow read one's mind, or the constant presence of intrusive thoughts. Paranoia is then deeply connected with anxiety, as Freud describes it as a perception "that there was something against [oneself], though [they] had no notion what it could be" (p. 10). Overall, it could be said that paranoia is motivated by hallucinations which alter the psychic balance, which, as it occurs in cases of obsessive neurosis, are neutralised by the patient's performance of ritualistic compulsions that allow them to feel a momentary sense of pleasure. However, these paranoid obsessions are much more illusory than those of neurotic nature, as the patient does not question their veracity and experiences them as if they were empirical facts without filtering them through a reality testing. This way, the obsessive constantly questions their reality while the paranoid becomes completely detached from the external reality. This reality, just as in cases of neurosis, is extremely uncomfortable for the patient, as their interpretation of reality is motivated by the repressed, causing the patient to, essentially, being forced to relive the past trauma masked under what the paranoid believes to be real. Despite this similarity, there is an important distinction between the nature of paranoia and obsessive neurosis: while projection in neurotic patients is based on the reassigning of one's perception onto an external object, the paranoid projection is based on the transference of guilt onto the outside fixation: that is, the neurotic will usually blame themselves for their actions, while the paranoid will be convinced that they were in the right, or that they had an excuse to behave malignantly.

For instance, in "Berenice", the narrator mentions his monomania regarding his cousin's teeth as a source of repetitive attention, as if he could only

concentrate on images and thoughts regarding them. The prolonged attention, although insignificant at first, later develops into a “disease” which the narrator cannot escape. These obsessions are intrusive and the narrator cannot stop ruminating: that is, he cannot stop thinking about them obsessively. Although the narrator does not explain why these thoughts provoke such irritability on him, it becomes clear that the preservation of Berenice’s teeth alters his mental state:

> The teeth! --the teeth! --they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me; long, narrow, and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them, as in the very moment of their first terrible development. Then came the full fury of my monomania, and I struggled in vain against its strange and irresistible influence. In the multiplied objects of the external world I had no thoughts but for the teeth. (p. 6)

Furthermore, in this example of obsession, the resolution of the conflict is not different than those analysed with regard to obsessive neurosis. However, when taking into account the unreliability of most of Poe’s narrators, it could be argued that the story is ironic because Egaeus is unable to distinguish reality and fantasy: he is a reliable narrator only in a pathological sense of the word. The fact that he gradually turns into a state of madness creates a dark atmosphere where it is difficult to distinguish between what is a product of his mind and reality. In this reading, the teeth are a symbol for paranoia and obsession of the main character, causing his preoccupation to grow more and more obsessive, eventually resorting to grave-robbing and extracting the woman’s teeth. This act of desecration adds to the reader’s suspicion that he has gone fully mad and manifests the effects his paranoid trance has on the narrator. The everyday setting also gives the whole story a rather paranoid gothic feel that Poe’s writing

is renowned for. The appearance of the grotesque mansion, the general gloominess, and the descriptions of Berenice's illness establish the mood of fear and modified Pre-Victorian Gothic, reflecting Egaeus's past and present anxious fright. This and other elements of the plot convey the fact that death and decay are the constant presence in Egaeus's imagination, such as Berenice's change from the embodiment of a prolific life to the spirit of death. Her decay influences Egaeus's obsession with the gloomy and death-related aspects of life that increases his own irrationality. Thus, Poe raises the curtain and demonstrates how Egaeus's minds works, his irrational phobias and fears. The horror here is psychological as opposed to physical: it derives from the main character's inner conflicts and not his environment. The primary and recurring element of this approach is the emphasis on the mind's abyss, which adds to the intensity of the paranoid undertone in the story. Consequently, in "Berenice", Poe succeeds in painting the picture of paranoia by such elements as the main character's odd behaviour, the twisty and creepy narrative, and the overall gloomy setting. These elements build a story which is equally concerned with both the study of the human mind and its destructive capacity through paranoia.

2. The Uncanny

"Berenice" is an interesting story to analyse as the source of paranoia. This can be approached by recourse to the uncanny. Within the psychoanalytical framework, the concept of the "uncanny" according to Sigmund Freud refers to the feeling of strangeness which is produced when something is both familiar and alien, or when elements repressed from the unconscious come back in a distorted manner, so that the patient is not able to recognise them yet experiences them as they did in the past. In the short story, Berenice herself is what prompts the

narrator's feeling of uncertainty – she is all decayed, yet her teeth remain healthy, and the narrator recognises she is his cousin, but "knew her no longer as Berenice" (p. 8) as she had changed so much because of her illness.

Freud describes the uncanny as essentially related to that which is both homely and foreign, inducing a deep manifestation of eeriness and strangeness. In Poe, it is this aspect that makes it so odd: it creates a sense of threat using the sides of stories and experiences one might have been told during childhood or that are present in one's everyday life. In this case, the narrator begins the story by mentioning his deceased mother, which is interesting considering that, perhaps, the narrator perceives Berenice's decay as a manifestation of his own mother. Taking into account the fact that the narration begins somewhat chronologically, the reader can interpret that his mother died when he was just an infant. Furthermore, since his mother died in the same chamber, the memory which haunts him and from which he is unable to escape could symbolise the repressed echo of his dead relative. Thus, by perceiving Berenice's decay, the narrator cannot help but picture his deceased mother, and his cousin's healthy teeth destabilise the repression by bringing forward the painful memory of past times in which his mother was alive. Thus, as Berenice's teeth are a resistance against repression, the narrator turns into a paranoid state which climaxes in the extraction of her healthy teeth. This reading of the story also brings to light the connection between trauma and the uncanny, as objects and situations, which were considered safe and familiar in early childhood, may cause fear and discomfort in adulthood if met in a different context.

Furthermore, in the story the double or doppelgänger is another source of the uncanny. In popular culture, meeting one's doppelgänger provokes a kind of

breathtaking anxiety that is rooted in the ambivalent identification with and rejection of the entity. Mirrors, reflected images, and twins produce this particular type of feelings because they touch upon the question of individuality. Overall, any object which might bear a resemblance of a human being or shows a possibility to come to life evokes feelings of unpleasure. Thus, distinctions between life and death which used to be evident turn hazy, and it becomes difficult to differentiate between life from non-life (Freud, 1919, pp. 1-22).

"William Wilson" is a great example of the latter. The analysis provided in chapter one could easily be relocated here. However, I will now examine the story's ending only, as it is a magnificent example of paranoid behaviour caused by the experience of the uncanny, which in this story is manifested through the figure of the doppelgänger. In the last scene of "William Wilson", the first-person narrator murders his double only to discover that he has actually caused the extinction of a part of himself. This moment, as already mentioned, fits the definition of the uncanny, since this is the only time that the protagonist is decided to face his halved conscience. The fact of the double is a mirror image of the narrator supports the idea that he is facing the inner repressed, and the ambiguity of the story's ending advances the protagonist's inability to differentiate between reality and hallucination. Overall, the confrontation of an entity which only the narrator can perceive is the greatest sign of paranoia in the story.

Repetition of events or experiences also result in the same perception of the uncanny. Repetitions excite the idea of predetermination or conspiracy somewhere, hence the element of fatefulness. Because of this, compulsion to repetition can generate primary anxieties regarding the loss of control and the predetermined course of events. Again, this theory is exemplified in "William

Wilson", since the narrator and his double encounter each other more than once throughout the narration.

3. Hallucinations and Delusion

Similarly, madness reaches deep into the psychic process of the individual, and Freudian psychoanalysis intends to analyse hallucinations and delusions as a way to understand the patient's descend into madness. Hallucinations are the perceptions that an individual gets from their senses instead from stimuli or objects of the external world. In Freud's view, hallucinations are among the ways the mind communicates the conflict or desire, which is usually suppressed by the individual. These can be remembered events with shapes and forms including traumatic ones or unresolved issues which manifest themselves in a distorted manner. On the other hand, delusions are purely irrational beliefs that are held despite the presence of concrete evidence which goes contrary to them. Freud's psychoanalytic approach defines hallucinations as well as delusions as symbolic manifestations of the intrapsychic struggles. These are indicative of operations which aim to work through internal conflict or to defend against anxiety or any other feeling of discomfort, and their analysis demonstrates how the conscious and unconscious interact in an individual's personality and how people mask or deal with inner psychological turmoil.

For instance, Poe shows how hallucinations and delusions are integrated into the story to depict paranoia in "The Black Cat." Features later described in psychoanalytical theory are effectively used by Poe in order to make the focus of the story go through the process of destructive transformation into a mad, guiltless, and sinful man. This is supported by the possibility that the second cat – which resembled Puto – can be explained as a creation of the protagonist's

initial and fleeting guilty conscience. In this way, the narrator's conviction that the cat is a torturous entity whose purpose is to haunt him for his actions becomes the best example of paranoid hallucination.

The presence of paranoia is complemented by the fact that the story is told from the protagonist's perspective, which has many contradictions and illogical subtexts because of the main character's growing psychological disorder. As a developer of the character's madness, paranoia also increases the need for violence, until the greatest tragedy of the story climaxes in the murder of the wife – who was only defending the poor cat from her husband. It is not until the last scene of the narrative, when the police discover the second cat buried alive with the protagonist's wife, that the harsh truth of his delusions is revealed. In this context, the evocative sound of the cat from behind the wall demolishes the protagonist's paranoid creations and brings the element of guilt and the inevitable confrontation with his madness.

Evidently, "The Black Cat" is a dissection which uses hallucinations and delusional elements to portray the protagonist's gradual psychological degradation, the complete disintegration of his own sanity. In addition to this, Poe's narrative provides the reader with a gothic fantasy of the impacts of guilt and degeneration of the vital ethical sense.

4. Psychosis

Following this line of thought, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic approach also accounts for the continuum going paranoia to psychosis. Thus, paranoia in Freud's initial view of the notion as a defence mechanism is characterised by extreme and irrational belief about external dangers or conspiracies. These

beliefs help to keep deep anxieties and guilt on an unconscious level. What is more, they relate to Freud's mechanism of projection, the dynamics of directing internal conflicts on towards objects in external reality.

As paranoia increases along with its latent wishes, Freud notes a shift towards psychosis, a profound disturbance in which the Ego's link with the reality world is weakened. Essentially, psychosis is a state of severe madness where patient has lost touch with reality and cannot interact normally with the environment. According to Freud, psychosis stems from unconscious conflicts that are beyond the Ego's power of control or repression. In this state, the patients turn inward and are immersed in a world where symbolic representations of their dysphoric perceptions become real to the subject.

The analysis of defence mechanisms by Freud also sheds light on the transition from paranoid schizophrenia to psychosis. Projection, fundamental in both conditions, serves the purpose of protecting the self from anything which is not comfortable to the patient, while transferring intra-psychic battles such as guilt in order to avoid further unpleasure. In psychotic states, other mechanisms like regression and dissociation deepen the patient's separation from normal social and psychological functioning; hence the fact their withdrawal within their distorted perception.

Following this line of thought, the whole narrative of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" can be interpreted as a progressive journey from paranoia to psychosis. Most prominently, confusion and the deteriorating state of the hero's mental health are effectively accompanied by motifs of decay, loneliness, and the degeneration of cogitation. First of all, one can recognize the paranoid condition of the twin brother, Roderick Usher. Roderick's obsession with his sister's death

can be compared to Freud's paranoia as a way of countering anxiety when inner conflicts are transformed into hostile objects outside of the self. After all, the death of Madeline Usher translates into the death of the Usher family, including of Roderick himself. It should be noted that, as the plot unfolds, Roderick is depicted as having a declining mental health status and approaching psychopathy. The man progressively withdraws from the real world and hallucinates due to extreme sensitivity to stimuli. For instance, he begins to hear strange noises which then grow into eerie hallucinations that increase his state of paranoid psychosis. These hallucinations and perceptual distortions represent Roderick's tendency to lose the discriminative ability between the fantasized self and the real world, which is in accordance with Freud's notion of psychosis.

This way, according to the Freudian framework, it becomes clear that the dark events portrayed in Poe's work, especially Roderick's gradual decline into psychosis, can be explained by the concept of repression and return of the repressed as mechanisms of the unconscious mind. On the other hand, the house, an element of Gothic architecture, becomes dilapidated and represents Roderick's decline, spreading physical and metaphorical disease. Finally, the spooky and Gothic setting of the story adds to the feeling of the approaching psychological breakdown; and the ending sentence of the story, where the fall of the Usher family becomes true, contributes to the disaster-focused tone of the story.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the level of interconnection between obsessive neurosis and paranoia in the analysed short stories can be deemed impressively high due to Edgar Allan Poe's mastery of stylistic devices. Poe's characters, while gradually

developing obsession and, finally, paranoiac traits, provide the reader with an insight into the overall development of an insane state. By using elements such as unreliable narrators, the Gothic imagery and symbolic figures, Edgar Allan Poe depicts in great detail the concept of moral deterioration inherent in the author's work. Stories like "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Black Cat" enable the reader to analyse how an obsession can grow into a paranoid breakout and finally collapse into a phase of ultimate psychosis. In this sense, by exploring these psychological abysses, Poe's works function as a reminder of the repercussions of uncontrolled mental illnesses and how they are connected to the theme of decay and corruption.

Conclusion

This BA Thesis has evaluated the close relation between obsessive neurosis and paranoia and their rendition in the stories by Edgar Allan Poe. Through this analysis, the psychological disorders portrayed by Poe advance Freudian theorisations, while also making evident that the author was enthusiastic about the exploration of madness in his works.

Freud's notions (obsessive neurosis and paranoia) offer a solid ground for comprehending the psychological developments of Poe's characters. Firstly, obsessive neurosis causes the protagonists to be haunted by irrational thoughts that trigger his compulsive behaviour, which functions as a soothing mechanism for most characters. Thus, obsessive neurosis forms the initial phase in most of Poe's stories, and then it is this same obsessive behaviour which is taken to a paranoid level – always motivated by irrational perceptions like hallucinations and delusions. This way, Freud's theory helps to understand how the conflicts and desires that have been repressed appear as paranoia and result in the complete loss of reality, essentially explaining why Poe's characters deviate from sanity and turn to moral decay. Furthermore, the depiction of Gothic features is often symbolic in Poe and serves as manifestations of both obsessive neurosis and paranoia.

Similarly, Poe prefigures Freudian ideas and notions of defence-mechanism and projection, which cause characters to shift their inner conflicts onto external objects. Furthermore, by explaining how the suppressed and

repressed thoughts and conflicts in the conscious moral realm produce the distinctly morbid features of paranoia seen in the works of Poe, it is possible to state that the author delved into the inner recesses of human psyche and provided sharp and memorable fictional renditions of mental breakdown.

Poe's short stories are best characterized as illustrating the psychological disorders of obsessive neurosis and paranoia, the process of a gradual psychic breakdown leading to insanity. Overall, Poe's short stories, rich in details of plot and action, anticipate psychoanalytical descriptions of psychopathy through the brilliant use of literary devices. Lines of further research have been pointed out in the conclusion sections of each of the chapters.

This BA Thesis confirms that Freud's ideas, as well as Poe's literary writings, remain significant to both literary and psychoanalytical research by pointing out the most crucial concerns of struggling with mental disorders and the influence of severe psychological alterations on their lives.

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